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ABSTRACT

One of several papers in a symposium on Kensington School (in Missouri), this document describes the effects on this elementary school of demographic change and racial transition in Milford School District. The authors first present a historical overview of the development of the school district and the role of blacks in the town from the eighteenth century through the early 1960s. They outline the founding of Kensington in the mid-1960s as an innovative school and its switch within 2 years to a more structured arrangement that still retained many innovative aspects. Problems that arose in the 1970s are reviewed, involving enrollment decline, immigration of black families, financial problems, school closings, and conflicts over the nature of "neighborhood schools." The effects of these problems on Kensington are traced, including moves toward stronger discipline, self-contained classrooms, a traditional curriculum, emphasis on order, and use of corporal punishment. The authors follow Milford's continuing enrollment declines, financial problems, and racial shifts and strains into 1980; discuss the effect of road patterns and social power on the neighborhood school concept; and speculate on future change in Milford. Four maps illustrate demographic and school changes from 1949 to 1980. (RW)

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Racial Transition and Neighborhood Schools: Kensington As A Case In Point

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[1]Presented as part of the symposium "Innovation and Change in American Education, Kensington Revisited: A 15 Year Follow-up of an Innovative School and Its Faculty" AERA, New York, March 20, 1982.

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Fifteen years after the Kensington experiment, local newspapers carried headlines such as the following:

> School closings pondered by Milford
>
> Enrollment drop, financial plight prompt boundary change proposals
>
> Milford board tries to preserve "neighborhood school" concept
> (Metro Gazette, 4/1979)
>
> Milford to Transfer 90 Elementary Students to Kensington
> (County Chronicle, 5/1979)
>
> Patrons pressure Milford Board
> Inject Racial Issues (Local Times, 3/1980)

Items such as these lured us outside the Kensington School and into its neighborhoods and the broader community. And as we began to see other instances, historical and contemporaneous, of the important roles that the community has played in Kensington's history, we decided to make these interdependencies of school and community the central focus of our third volume of Kensington Revisited. The points we make about racial transition and neighborhood schools are abstracted from that report. What we propose to do now is to first tell about community and school history, and then discuss a number of implications from our case in point.

Historical Overview

The Milford School District has had Black residents for as long as it has had White. During the times of French and Spanish exploration and settlement, West African slaves played a vital part in

regional development. When Milford passed into American hands with the Louisiana Purchase, the institution of slavery was well established locally with about a quarter of the population of the three closest towns being Negro slaves. By the onset of the War of 1812, a military commander named Elias Chester became one of Milford's first settlers. Chester's ancestors were among the first Pilgrims on the northeast seaboard and Elias himself, at age 12, served as a fifer in the Revolutionary War. The Chester homestead grew into a thriving plantation which came to encompass about a third of the total area of the Milford School District. Commander Chester was both a national and local hero, whose friends included the statesman Henry Clay and the explorers Lewis and Clark. When Elias Chester passed away in the 1840's, his estate included 34 slaves.

The Chester family was a pillar of the frontier Milford Community. The first church within current district boundaries, Carlton Methodist, was built on eight acres donated by the Chester family. The small congregation, along with the slaves owned by church members, constructed a house of worship in the 1850's. Slaves were denied formal church membership, but were permitted seating in a galley to the rear of the church. Here many of the Black hands that had built Carlton Methodist could be folded in prayer. On the outskirts of the church cemetary, Milford's Black slaves buried their dead. Today the Carlton Methodist Church and cemetary are still intact, though 130 years of progress is all around them. Likewise, the Chester homestead stands on the same site where it was built in 1812. The Chester family occupied the old

plantation home until the 1960's when it was proclaimed an historic site. Today subdivisions, parks, and shopping centers bearing some form of the name "Chester" are reminders of Milford's past.

We know very little about the fate of Milford's slave population after the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation. We assume that some freed slaves continued working as salaried employees for their former masters, while others sought a livelihood in nearby urgan areas such as Metropolitan City. The construction of railroads greatly facilitated such mobility, and tracks were laid through Milford in the 1880's. Before the turn of the century, two one-room schools were built within present district boundaries: Clear Valley on the west side and Marquette on the east. The community was entirely agricultural. About the turn of the century a brick factory was built in the Milford community along the railroad. The "company housing" provided for workers became Milford's first small community known as Pleasant Hill. This village of about 50 families was made up mostly of poor Whites and Blacks. White children attended the one-room Clear Valley School. A second schoolhouse named Attucks was built to serve the Black community. Graduates of the Clear Valley School who desired high school education went to a nearby White suburban community. Attucks graduates were required to travel some 15 miles by streetcar to Metropolitan City and an all-Black high school.

The memories of World War I's hardships were still quite vivid when a large tract of land just south of Pleasant Hill was advertized in 1919 with the following headline: "Little City Farms--Metropolitan City's answer to food speculators." What had been a farm owned by the

descendents of Elias Chester was surveyed and subdivided into some 400 lots. The new subdivision called Milford Village sold quickly, for lots averaging one half acre could be purchased for $25 down and $10 a month. Milford Village was in the country, to be sure. However residents could commute to Metropolitan City on the streetcar in 45 minutes. The fare was only 9¢ each way. Although lots were sold quickly, construction of homes proceeded slowly and without the benefit of central planning. Buyers were urged to "Put up any kind of a cheap building, get into it and stop paying rent. Get your garden and chickens going." Only dirt roads linked the scattered homes of early Milford, which, until the mid-1920's had neither sewers, electricity, nor telephone service. Lack of amenities notwithstanding, the semi-rural community saw fit to formally organize the Clear Valley School District in 1920. The passage of a bond issue allowed the construction of three additional rooms to Clear Valley Elementary School. In 1926 the School Board was expanded to six members and the District name Clear Valley was changed to Milford. In the same period construction of the first Catholic Church and School, St. Dominic Savio, portended the strong Catholic quality of the community that persists to the present day.

Soon the Milford Village Improvement Association was formed with a principal responsibility for hauling cinders and spreading them over the roads. Population increases in the community required the Board of Education to construct a second school, called Milford Elementary located in the center of town. The four-room Clear Valley School was converted into the area's first high school and renamed Milford High. A volunteer fire department was formed, with the Church bells at St. Dominic's rung by the parish priest to call out the firefighters.

The small "company town" of Pleasant Hill also grew throughout the 1920's. For the most part, however, the two communities of Milford and Pleasant Hill had very little social exchange with one another. One exception was in the schools. The White families of Pleasant Hill sent their children to Milford Elementary or Milford High School. The Black families were required by law to send their children to Attucks Elementary, and into Metropolitan City for High School.

The Great Depression virtually halted growth and development in the Milford School District. The brick plant, linked as it was to the construction industry, laid off many workers. Numerous families were forced to seek public relief and some foreclosed on their mortgages and lost their homes. Overall, however, the Depression had less impact on the Milford community than elsewhere, for many had heeded the advice to get their "gardens and chickens going." St. Dominic's parish became a center of social and religious life. Many of the old timers we spoke to have many fond memories of dances and socials in the parish hall in the 1930's. The volunteer fire department, in addition to its public service, assumed an important social function for many of the unemployed men in the community who spent quite a bit of time hanging around the engine house. The WPA and other New Deal relief agencies provided important assistance to Milford by putting people to work on public projects. Road construction and improvement was much needed and the WPA crews made considerable progress in and around Milford. The Midvale Highway and Bridge was one such project that put many to work and set in place Milford's last major transportation route.

The rumblings of war cast an ominous shadow on the Milford community as it began to recover from the grip of economic depression. Two large defense contractors constructed plants within easy access of the semi-rural community and many families found work in the production of military technology. Milford's women assumed an increasing role in the operation of these factories as men were called to serve their country in the war effort. As in the preceeding wars that Milford citizens had served in, not all the soldiers returned home. Those who did looked back on 15 years of hardship and forward to an era of prosperity.

The road to prosperity was not as smooth as the roads built by the WPA workers. The Cold War and events in Korea fostered a continued state of military preparedness which kept the nearby defense industries at full production and expanding operations. Job opportunities lured many from urban Metropolitan City and outlying small towns into the southwest quarter of the county where the defense contractors, and the Milford School District were located. Milford's pastures and woodlands, in a few short years, became choice real estate. As the construction industry recovered from a most severe slump, the demand for masonry materials had Milford's Brick Plant returning to full production. Open pit mining expanded to the western edge of the Pleasant Hill community. Soon families living in the company housing were evicted and a score of homes and the Attucks School were demolished. A new Black school was built across the road. In 1949, the more general trend of county expansion precipitated a regional school district reorganization. The one-school Marquette District on the east side of Midvale Road was absorbed by Milford and nearly doubled the district's geographical area. The newly reorganized Milford School District is shown as Figure 1. The five schools which

Insert Figure 1 About Here

served the community were the same as before the depression: Milford High School, Milford Elementary, Attucks Elementary, Marquette Elementary, and St. Dominic Savio. Also in 1949, the first municipality in the School District was incorporated as the city of Marquette Bluffs. The frontal edge of a wave of development surged over the Milford District. Three more municipalities were incorporated in the next two years. The first, Fort Carlton Estates tried to annex Milford Village. The latter incorporated as the City of Milford to stay these attempts. In the southeast corner of the district, the Town of Edgemenont also began providing municipal services to the rapidly growing subdivisions.

The next decade was characterized by unprecedented population growth. In 1950 there were only 14 subdivisions in the entire district. Thirty-six more were built by 1960. Between 1953 and 1963 the school district added nearly a school a year to the growing community. Three elementary schools were built on the east side (Field, Johnson, and McBride) and four on the west (Hillside, Grant, Williams, and Edinburg). The old high school became a junior high when a new high school was built. Soon to follow was a brand new junior high school During this same period six parochial elementary schools were built in the community. Five were Catholic and one Lutheran. While Milford was experiencing this period of explosive population growth only one school was closed, Attucks Elementary. The historic 1954 Supreme Court decision put an end to segregation in the Milford School District. The community, as it appeared in 1963, is shown as Figure 2.

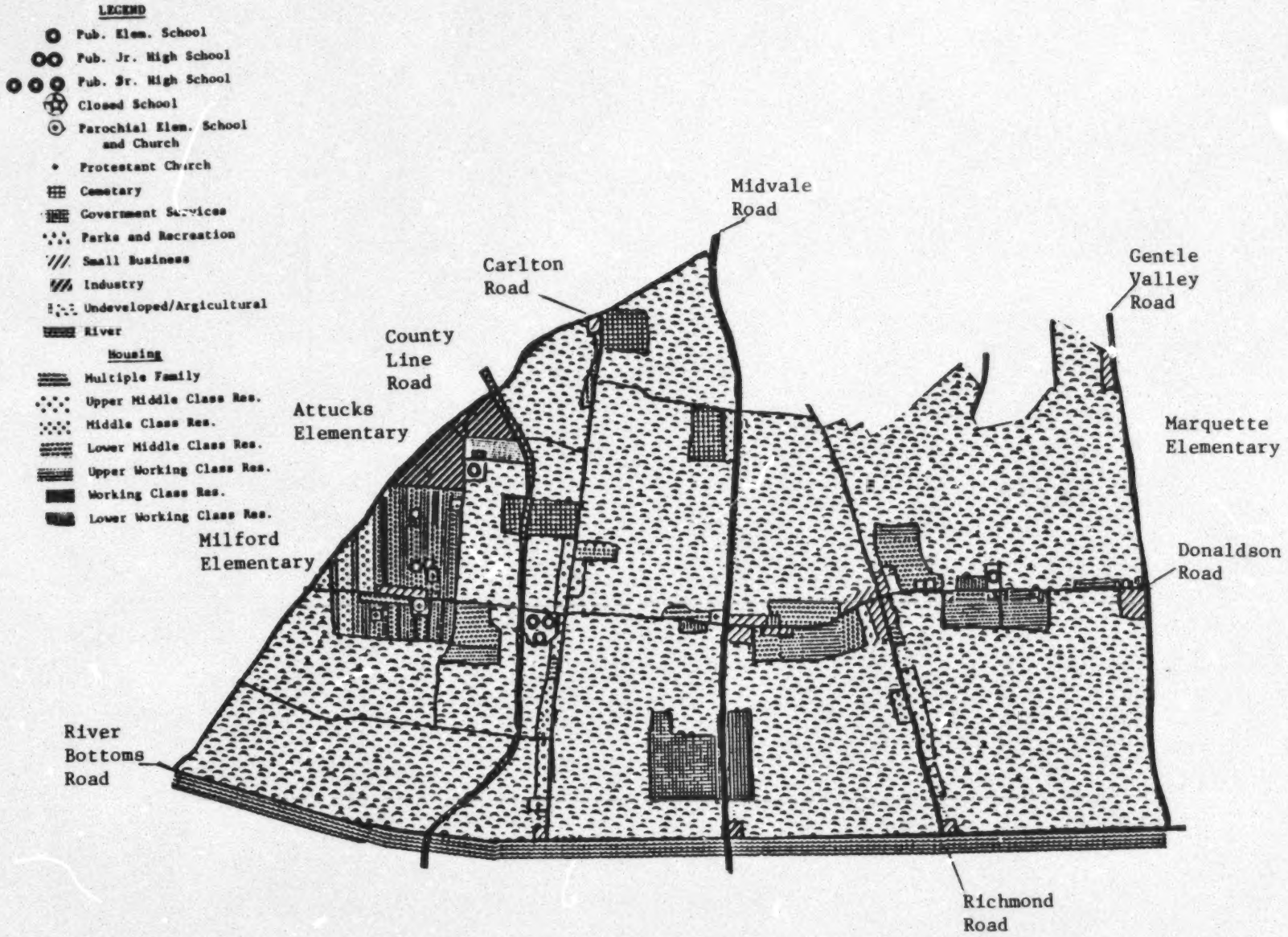

Figure 1 The Milford School District in 1949

Insert Figure 2 About Here

The trailing edge of post war growth and development passed over the Milford School District in the 1960's Two very large shopping centers were already in place just outside the district boundaries. Smaller shops and businesses sprung up along the major thoroughfares in Milford. A mid-sized manufacturing plant was built across the tracks adjacent to Pleasant Hill. Together with the Brick factory, this northwest corner of the district was the only significant industrial sector in Milford and employed about 250 workers. By this time, the Black population in Pleasant Hill consisted of only a dozen or so families. The overall pattern of development had left the School District a bedroom community, populated by young White families, and with only a small commercial tax base. Milford's last two schools were built in 1964, both on the east side of the district. The first completed was called Midvale Elementary, named for its location near the district's principal highway. The last school was named for two neighborhoods recently added to the District. Kensington was a recombinant form of Kennerly Heights, a 140 family lower middle class subdivision, and Singleton Terrace, a 400 unit apartment complex bordering the new school. Kensington's name presages the interdependencies of school and community and the issues of racial transition and neighborhood schools that soon will follow.

The community conservatism observed by Smith and Keith in 1964 was firmly rooted in local history, and continues to the present. The boldly innovative Kensington School was an anomaly whose progressive vision of schooling was very much at odds with community standards. Within two

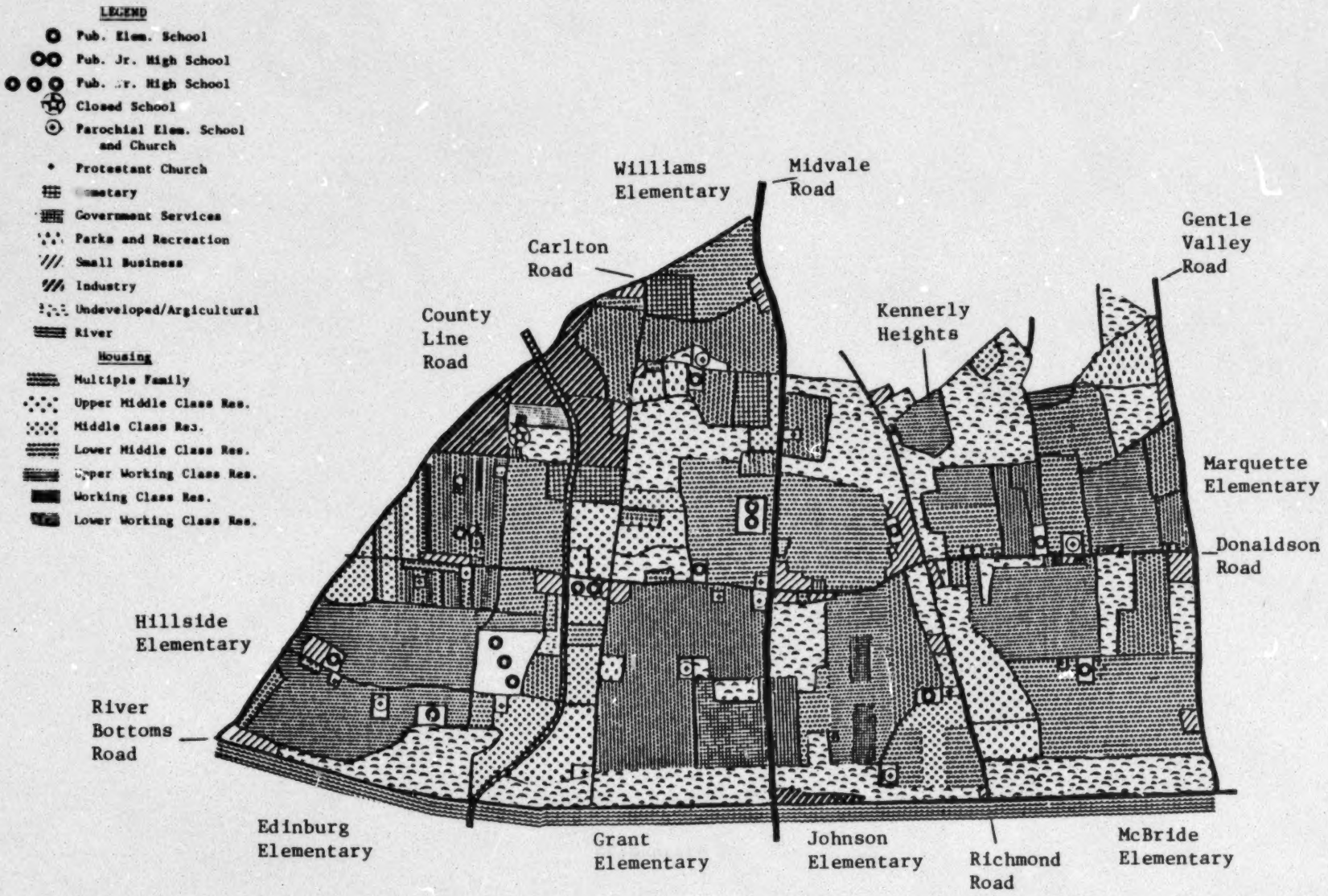

Figure 2 The Milford School District in 1963

years, however, the sentiments of patrons were voiced at the polling place. Changes in the Board of Education were accompanied by changes in the superintendency, and the appointment of a new principal at Kensington Elementary. Nearly the entire teaching staff was also replaced. These sweeping personnel changes brought about changes at Kensington, to be sure. Curriculum and instruction became much more structured. However, the new principal, Michael Edwards, was favorably impressed with a number of the things he saw at Kensington and chose to retain such features as the non-punitive, child-centered approach, team teaching, and non-gradedness. Though Kensington was modified by Edwards, we would still characterize it as an innovative school, and even an improved school. The first six years of Edwards' tenure as principal we call the "Golden Age," as a hard-working, dedicated staff enjoyed each other's company, and enjoyed teaching the largely cooperative, White, lower middle-class group of Kensington children. Community support of Kensington and near devotion to Mr. Edwards manifested itself in organizations such as Mothers' Clubs which provided very important financial and volunteer assistance to the school, and buffered Edwards from other community pressures.

As Kensington and the Milford Community passed into the 1970's an unincorporated area which included much of the Kensington attendance area was annexed by the City of Gordonville. In the entire district only a few parcels of land remained undeveloped. Several of these tracts were quite close to Kensington and were zoned for multi-family dwellings. Residents who had moved to Milford in the 1950's were older now and many of their children had passed through the Milford School system. Enrollments peaked in 1970 and in that year less than one percent of the student population was Black. In 1971, enrollments began declining in

the district in an uninterupted trend to the present. That same year financial strains forced the School Board to close all district schools for several weeks. These economic woes have also continued to the present. In 1973 a number of Black families moved within the boundaries of Milford as a part of much broader pattern of suburban migration. Most resided in the new Embassy Apartment complex in the Kensington attendance area. As the first Black children began attending the innovative school, Michael Edwards, Kensington's principal, showed the first signs of the cancer that would take his life in the bicentennial year. 1973 marked the end of the "Golden Age" and the beginning of profound educational and demographic changes at Kensington Elementary School.

As enrollments continued to dip district-wide, Kensington School operated at full capacity, largely due to the additon of young Black families living at the Embassy Apartments. Panic spread over the Kennerly Heights subdivision just across the street. One former resident told us that "For Sale" signs "sprang up like mushrooms." In a few short years, 90% of the White families were replaced by Blacks who were delighted with the many bargains found in this cul de sac subdivision. By 1974 the five elementary schools on the west side of the District were operating only at 77% capacity. The six schools on the east side were 83% of capacity. Concurrently, expenditures were exceeding receipts and the Milford School District entered a deficit spending year. A committee of principals was appointed to study options of school closings. In early 1975 the committee submitted its report, which included over a dozen alternatives, complete with a listing of the pros

and cons of each option. As we examined this report, it appeared that three broad and sometimes overlapping criteria guided the difficult decision of closing schools:

1) Fiscal Responsibility: The cost of operating an elementary school was in the range of $95,000 per year. Enrollments were such that students could be housed in nine rather than 11 buildings with savings of $190,000 per year.
2) Quality Education: School closings, and the necessary reassignment of pupils was deemed acceptable only if the quality of education did not decline. Programmatic standards included pupil/teacher ratios, physical facilities, curricular and extra-curricular activities.
3) Neighborhood School Concept: This criterion embodied a range of concerns which included property values in the affected areas, social adjustments of displaced students, safety of walking pupils, and distance and expense of busing.

That schools must be closed was a foregone conclusion; it remained only a matter of deciding which schools. In this milieu we found school and community interdependencies highly visible as petitions from municipal officials and ad hoc community groups requested that their neighborhood school be preserved. Likewise, threatened teachers beseeched the Board to spare their school and jobs. Finally the Board deliberated and the Marquette School on the east and the Grant School on the west would be closed at the end of the school year. In 1976, the displaced students were distributed among six elementary schools, three on each side of the district. No transfers were made across Midvale Road. Except for one apartment complex on the west side which continued to be served by Field School on the east side, no elementary students crossed Midvale Road. The boundary changes resulting from this decision are shown as Figure 3. Kensington School, which was at full capacity, was unaffected by changes in attendance areas.

Insert Figure 3 About Here

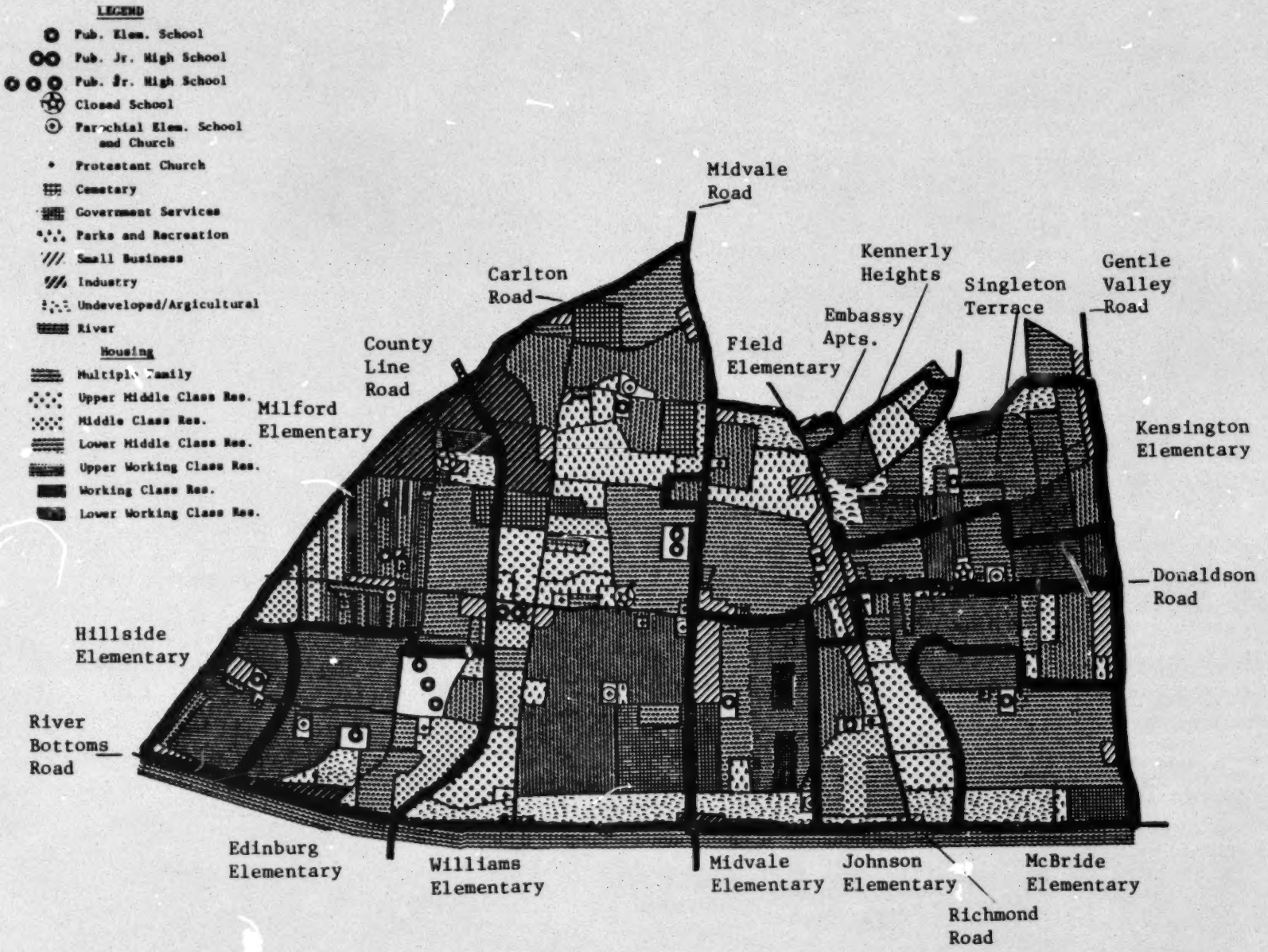

Figure 3 The Milford School District in 1976

The pattern of Black suburban migration continued southward along a corridor on either side of Richmond Road. This left the west side of the district virtually all White, and the east side of the district integrated. Midvale Road became the dividing line.

At the Kensington School a near state of crisis existed. The all-White staff found itself completely unprepared for the cultural changes that accompanied the demographic shifts. Teachers perceived attitude, achievement, and behavior problems with the new group of youngsters and sensed that their tried and true teaching and management techniques were ineffectual. Likewise, the Black children found the open, progressive Kensington quite unlike their school in the city. The ailing Michael Edwards was torn between his personal belief that the Kensington program could still work, and the teachers' requests for stronger discipline and self-contained classrooms. Several walls were constructed in open learning suites, which, we were told, was an agonizing decision for the supportive principal. As Edwards' health continued to decline, the teaching staff closed ranks around their devoted leader and themselves assumed a large degree of administrative responsibility. When Michael Edwards finally succumbed to cancer and memorial services were held at Kensington School, one third of the student body was Black. The teaching staff experienced much grief and little hope about their instructional difficulties. The Kensington School was renamed Michael Edwards Elementary.

William Hawkins, nearing retirement, was taken from his classroom at Field Elementary, and placed in the principal's office at the Kensington School. At this time, Black enrollments accounted for 14% in the district as a whole and

Kensington School contained the highest proportion of Blacks of any of the schools. Enrollments continued to decline in the district, but not at Kensington. In 1977, the School Board sought to alleviate Kensington's crowded conditions and equalize enrollments by transferring 90 Black students residing in Kennerly Heights to Midvale Elementary, also on the east side of the district. One school board member, a White woman, placed an issue on the school board agenda that had never appeared before: racial balance in the Milford District. An ad hoc citizens' group of west side, White residents showed up at the board meeting and vehemently protested even the discussion of racial balance, let alone any policy which involved exchanges of elementary students. The issue of racial balance was withdrawn from the agenda. That same year, Larder Road was extended and effectively bounded Kennerly Heights and the Embassy Apartments by hazardous roads. In the following year, 1978, half of the Kennerly Heights pupils were returned to Kensington.

At Kensington, the new principal's rural background meshed easily with the teaching staff, but Hawkins exerted minimal leadership, and was himself the victim of failing health. The teachers, largely fending for themselves, continued their course of increasing rigidity. Corporal punishment became an approved and widespread management technique, and more walls were put up between classrooms. The stress the faculty experienced was compounded by a very high turnover in the student population. In 1979, fully one-third of the student body enrolled or withdrew sometime during the school year. Most of the arriving and departing children were Black and lived in apartment units which, in the Kensington attendance area, now numbered 1600. The fluidity of the population was catalyzed, in part, by federal subsidies which made suburban

housing accessible to urban residents. The high turnover complicated the task of teaching, needless to say. Registration and arrangements for withdrawals also taxed the principal, secretary, and school counselors and created a great deal of paperwork. 1979 was the year we returned to Kensington and most noticeable among the many changes we observed was racial composition. Sixty percent of the Kensington children were now Black. We found very few vestiges of innovation and encountered a school organization operating under a great deal of stress.

District enrollments continued to decrease and once again the need to close another elementary school became imminent. Black enrollments continued to increase with virtually all of the Black community still residing on the east side of Midvale Road. Racial tensions became apparent in isolated incidents. One such case involved four Milford High School students who were charged with assault and property damage in their harrassment of a Black family who moved into a subdivision on the west side of Midvale Road. Severe discipline problems at the High School became major items in the Board meetings.

As the school year drew to a close, the Milford School Board proposed to return the remaining Kennerly Heights students from Midvale Elementary to their neighborhood school, Kensington. Midvale Elementary had become crowded as the Black residential movement continued in a southward direction. District patrons, which included members of the Kensington PTA, along with district teachers appeared at the spring school board meetings and urged the Board to reassign the 45 Kennerly Heights students to less crowded schools in the west half of the district. The Board, however, voted to carry out its plan to return the students to Kensington, their neighborhood school.

At the end of the school term Mr. Hawkins retired. We have characterized his three year tenure as "marking time." His successor, Jonas Wales, would be a strong leader who would entrench and stabilize Kensington's return to tradition. Teachers who had existed in a leadership vacuum for a half dozen years, welcomed and approved of Wales' stern, no-nonsense attitude. The Kensington experiment was over. Only the building, itself greatly modified, contained any clues to the innovative vision launched there 15 years earlier.

In 1980 the issue of race surfaced with a potency unprecedented in Milford history. The Black community, concentrated on the east side now accounted for 30% of district enrollments. And not all were satisfied with district policy. A newspaper article illustrated some of the concerns expressed at one board meeting:

> William Beck, who enrolled his 5th grader last week in Johnson School told the board that he took great exception to the enforced use of "Yes m'am" and "No m'am" when addressing a teacher. He felt it was an unnecessary measure of control, calling it "plantation and Gestapo" tactics that were reportedly not used when the school was predominately White.

The board responded to this complaint by stating that decisions such as mode of address were determined by individual schools.

The financial problems that had been plaguing the district were unrelenting. Inflation sent per pupil costs soaring and it had been over a decade since a tax levy had passed. Once again, options were limited and school closings were imminent. A committee of school administrators was charged with conducting a study which would explore the options for school closings. In addition to

financial considerations, redrawing of attendance areas was also to relieve crowded conditions at the Field Elementary School, now a predominately Black school. None of the plans submitted, however, included racial criteria or the possibility of busing additional students across Midvale Road. Although the alternatives were developed by district personnel, school board by-laws permitted patrons to propose alternate plans. A Black parents' group submitted one such plan which would have 58 Black children transported from the east side of the district to the west. While adhering to the financial, educational, and even neighborhood school criteria, this parents' group introduced a new parameter to the decision-making: racial balance, a criterion that the board had not had to deal with since the 1954 Supreme Court Decision. The Black parents maintained that the district had a moral obligation with respect to integration, and particularly in the two junior high schools, both on the west side of the district and where one school was 49% Black, and the other only 2%. These ideas drew no favor from the Board of Education, and the eventual decision to close Hillside Elementary on the west side maintained the racial status quo. Longer range plans were to close the Old Junior High School. The boundary changes resulting from the decision to close Hillside Elementary are shown in Figure 4. In the spring of 1980 two

Insert Figure 4 About Here

Black women, part of the parent's group, announced their candidacy for seats on the school board. Each was defeated by a wide margin by White male incumbents. That same month the Black Citizens' group filed a complaint with the Justice Department alleging that the district "encourage(d) and

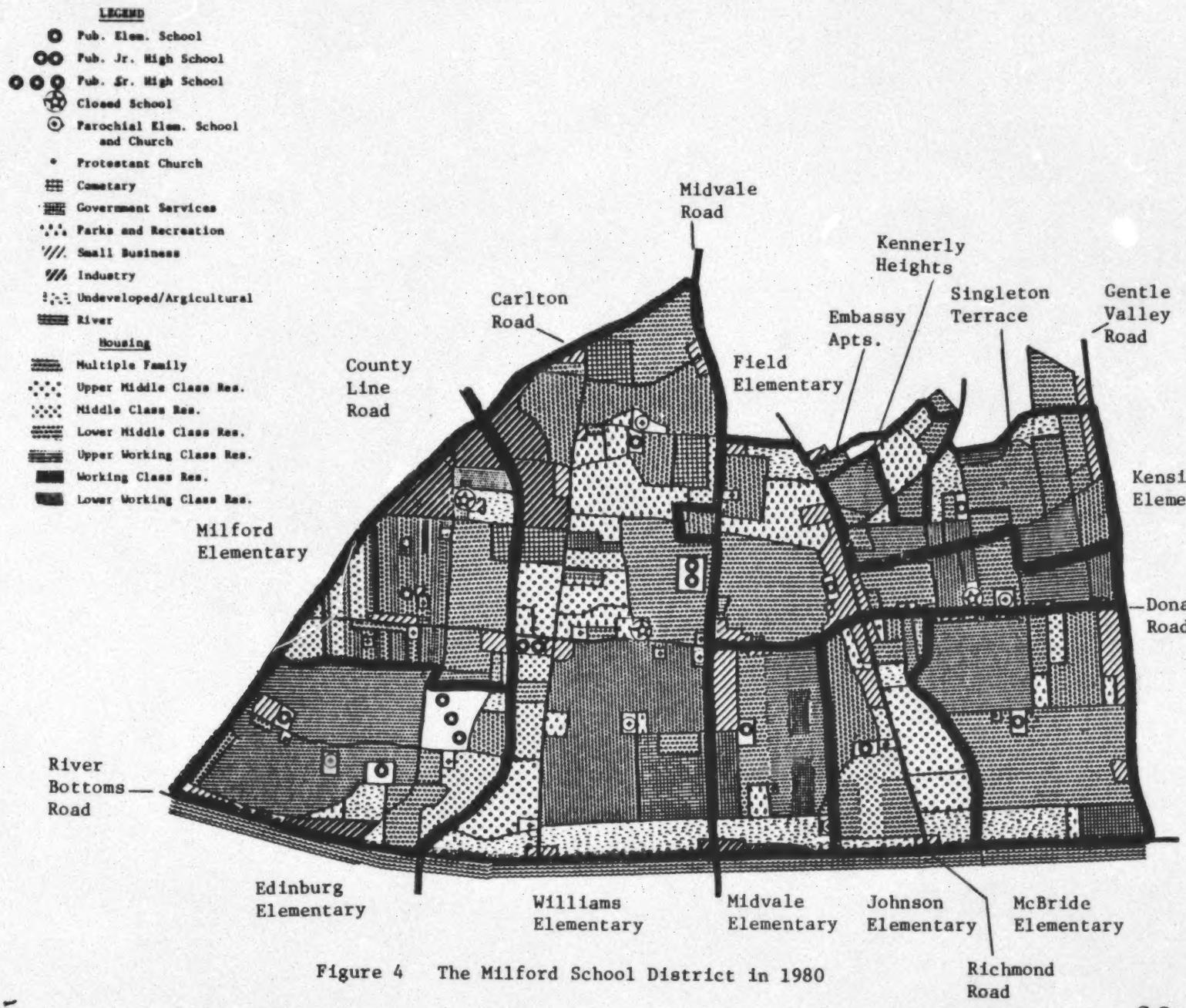

Figure 4 The Milford School District in 1980

enforce(d) racially segregated schools" and stated that "such policies have resulted in discrimination against the students attending predominantly Black schools as to the educational facilities, services and opportunities available to them." District officials claimed no responsibility for housing patterns, which they contended, were responsible for racial imbalance between elementary schools. At the secondary level, all district students attended Milford High School and in two years, when the Old Junior HIgh was to close, only one Junior High School would serve the entire student population. The Milford School Board never heard from the Justice Department. At the present time, racial balance has been a low priority issue for the Milford School Board. Currently, Black enrollments stand at 40% district-wide and are increasing, while overall enrollments continue to drop. Financial problems persist and further school closings are imminent.

Conclusion

In principle, the neighborhood school is claimed by residents living within a one-mile radius of the school building. However, beneath the surface appeal and common sense probity of this definition lurks a very complex concept. Right away exceptions to geographical proximity appear, as in the case where some homes are close to more than one school, and others are close to none. Further complicating this apparently straight forward notion is the nature of Milford's thoroughfares and transportation routes which substructure the community by creating residential sections bounded by hazardous roads. The historical

significance of these boundaries can be appreciated by knowing that six of eight of Milford's major roads were in place before the turn of the century. Midvale Road, the dividing line between east and west, and Milford's most dangerous highway, was a WPA project of the 1930's. Larder Road, itself quite old, was extended to connect with Richmond Road in 1977. When this route was completed, a major barrier was placed between Kensington School and the Embassy Apartments and Kennerly Heights subdivision. Children could no longer walk to Kensington, or for that matter, any school in the district. In situations like this, when the district must transport students, we see opportunities to promote racial balance within a school district. As our history shows, however, the School Board was not so inclined.

Sentimentally, the neighborhood school concept carries a positive valence and a variety of interpretations which may be derived anywhere from conversations across the back fence, to church services across the district. Of the many ways to construe a neighborhood, the subdivision is a useful unit for beginning the discussion. Subdivisions which include apartment complexes, generally have an identity which can be recognized by the age of housing, its architecture, and often signs and street names. In Milford, subdivisions ranged in size from as few as a dozen to as many as 800 homes or apartments.

Subdivisions have much variability in their degree of organization. When a part of a municipality, our data show several instances of municipal officials interceding with the school board to honor their claim on a neighborhood school within city limits. In certain cases, as with two west side municipalities, zoning ordinances, housing codes and occupancy

permits influenced the make-up of the city, and in turn determined the composition of the student body in the neighborhood school. Of all the community voices, municipal concerns seemed to be listened to most seriously on the issue of school closings. Subdivisions in unincorporated areas are of two types: those which have homeowners associations, and those which do not. Though neither was seen to be actively involved as an interest group in Board Policy decisions, our data indicate the ability of the homeowners associations in determining residential patterns. One case we observed had a subdivision purchasing vacant land to prevent construction of an apartment complex. The least influential residential group appeared to be apartment dwellers. We believe it no coincidence that children from multi-family housing were disproportionately involved in busing and school transfers.

In addition to all the preceeding facets of the neighborhood school, history and tradition come into play in both the meaning of the term, and its use in policy decision-making. Consider, for example, the role of tradition in the case of Kennerly Heights. This subdivision's identity with Kensington is embedded in the school's name. Yet when Kensington became overcrowded, 90 children from Kennerly Heights were bused to Midvale Elementary. Holding the question of why Kennerly Heights was selected, suffice it to say the decision to return these Black children to Kensington stirred considerable emotion among White parents who feared the trend in Black enrollments at Kensington. The Board stuck by its decision, reasoning that Kensington historically had been the neighborhood school for the subdivision of Kennerly Heights. The neighborhood school concept had not come into use as a ploy for

segregation. We have found it in use in Milford before Kensington was built and long before race was ever an issue. Defenders of Board policy during the period of racial transition could argue that decisions about school boundaries have shown a great deal of consistency over the years. Critics might argue that the Board was unresponsive to a changing community and the spirit, if not the letter, of the law of the land.

We have come to see School Board decisions about school closings guided by the responsibility to provide the highest quality of education that resources will permit, uniformly distributed across the district, while trying to maintain neighborhood schools. Fiscal and academic standards are for the most part clear cut criteria. The neighborhood school, on the other hand, has a vagueness and multiplicity of meaning which allows decision-makers a fair amount of latitude of interpretation, and to have some flexibility in dealing with community constituencies pressing various interests. Those concerns which seemed to carry the most clout were the ones with the broadest constituencies, the highest degree of organization, and which represented property owners. Racial balance was not one of the guidelines used in determining attendance areas for the first of these three reasons, lack of popular support. District officials were confident that they violated no laws in their policy, and Board members could well imagine the political consequences of a proactive stance on racial issues. The Black Parents' group who failed to persuade the Board to act on their concern, who were defeated in their campaign for the School Board, and whose complaints

with the Justice Department were unsuccessful must have been disillusioned with the democratic process. They probably take little consolation in the changes that have occurred since the decades of slavery, and the days of the "colored" school called Attucks. Just as demographic factors have had a large role to play in the transformation of Kensington, we see these factors increasing in importance in the district's future. If the current trend continues, Black enrollments in Milford will pass 50% within a few years. School closings will increasingly weaken the neighborhood school concept. Because of school closings, grades 7 through 12 will be completely integrated next year. With the continuing demographic shifts, we see the chances improving for Black citizens to make changes in the system. We also speculate that in the absence of litigation, the School Board is unlikely to act on the issue of racial balance until the majority of community sentiment supports this value. The history of the Kensington School teaches us that change, while fragile, is possible, and that gradualist strategies may be more acceptable to a conservative community. The "Alternative of Grandeur" of the kind Superintendent Spanman initiated at Kensington had little chance of survival. We also recognize that under court orders, as when Attucks School was closed in 1955, citizens accepted the changes. To us, it does not seem to be a question of <u>if</u> racial issues will be addressed in Milford, but <u>when</u>. Whether by court decree, or by demographics and democracy, it seems that change is inevitable.